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THE MAC

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13	Kickin' Incredibly Dope Shit (Intro)	3:45	\$0.69	+
14	Good Evening	2:55	\$0.69	+

Total Tracks: 18 Total Length: 52:43

ALBUM INFORMATION

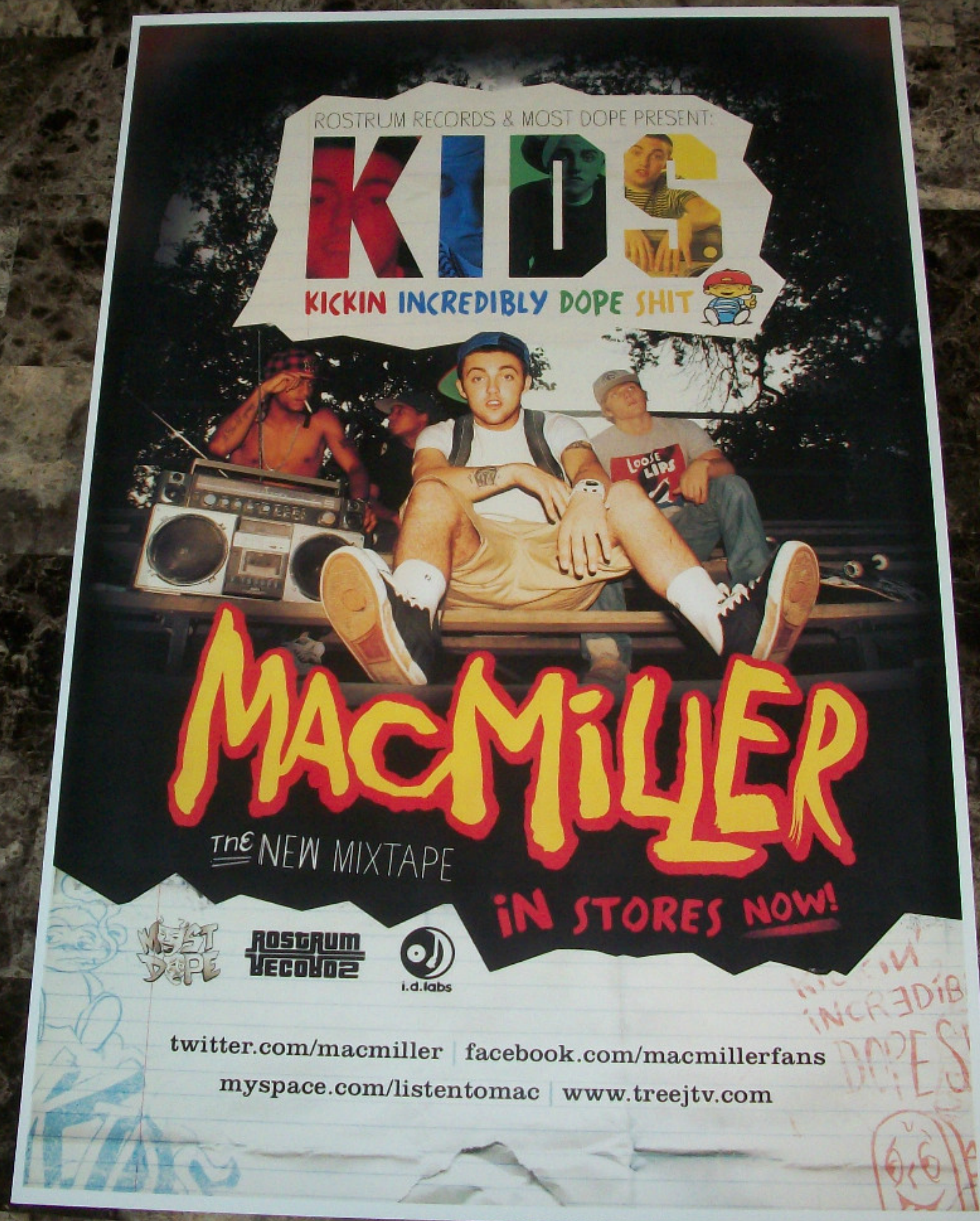
Artist: The Mac ([See All Albums by The Mac](#))

Genre: Hip-Hop/R&B, Style: Rap, Hip-Hop

Label: [Piff Tapes](#) / [IODA](#)

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## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

## For Some, Free Music Is an Investment That Pays Off



David Wolff-Patrick/Redferns

The rapper Mac Miller performing in Paris in September. His independently released debut album is atop the Billboard album chart, a success that reflects his Internet fan base.

By JON CARAMANICA

Published: November 18, 2011

What's the value of a career's worth of Internet buzz? Approximately 175,000 albums sold in one week — then look out below from there.

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On Wednesday the Pittsburgh rapper Mac Miller [topped the Billboard album chart with his debut](#) album, “Blue Slide Park” (Rostrum), selling about 144,000 albums. The week before, the Washington rapper Wale made his debut at No. 2 on the chart (behind Justin Bieber’s Christmas album) with “Ambition” (Maybach Music Group/Warner Brothers), which sold about 164,000 copies. And last month J. Cole’s first album, “Cole World: The Sideline Story” (Roc Nation), made its bow atop the chart with about 217,000 copies sold in its first week. (All figures are from Nielsen SoundScan.)

First, the good news: A new generation of rappers is actively trying to build a new business model in which releasing oodles of free material online builds a fan base that paves the way for revenue streams: touring, merchandise, even something as old-fashioned as a record deal.

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Chad Batka for The New York Times  
Rappers like Wale have done well on the record charts in recent weeks, thanks in part to free mixtapes online that have stoked fans' willingness to pay for albums.

"Blue Slide Park" (Rostrum) is the first independently released album to top the chart since Tha Dogg Pound's "Dogg Food" (Death Row), in 1995. But Tha Dogg Pound was affiliated with Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg, the heavy hitters of the day.

While the Rostrum label has also nurtured the career of Wiz Khalifa, Mac Miller arrives at the top of the chart more or less on his own. The Internet made him as popular as Wale (pronounced wah-LAY), an artist who's been on two major labels and is affiliated with Rick Ross, and J. Cole,

who is signed to Jay-Z's label. (Being white probably helped Mac Miller too — more on that shortly.)

Each of these artists followed a similar path to arrive at this point: release a string of mixtapes, the free albums that were once native to street corners but are now the preserve of the Internet, and augment them with an active social-media presence, from Twitter to video blogging. (For Wale, this is the second time down the same road: His 2009 major-label debut, "Attention Deficit," on Allido/Interscope, was a bust.)

That Mac Miller has topped the Billboard album chart maybe says more about the state of record sales than about the popularity of Mac Miller. Certainly, a No. 1 debut isn't meaningful in and of itself; it may simply indicate that executives were clever enough to pick a release date that wouldn't compete with Taylor Swift or Lil Wayne or Adele or Jay-Z.

And while these first-week sales numbers are impressive in a tough climate for the traditional record business, they're numbers that reflect, at best, pent-up demand: proof of concept, if you will, that an artist's virtual fame can translate to fans spending real-world dollars on a product that they could easily steal (unlike a T-shirt). About 76 percent of Mac Miller's sales were digital; for Wale and Mr. Cole, working in a major-label system, the numbers were 42 percent and 43 percent; the majority of their sales were hard copy.

But once the loyalists have spent their money, then what? Be mindful of the drop in sales from Week 1 to Week 2 — these artists have so far had only moderate success on radio, which is where albums go to not die. In their second week on sale, Wale and Mr. Cole's albums each sold just a quarter of their first-week numbers. Without the singles to guarantee them consistent exposure and, by extension, consistent sales, these first-week figures will be a historical blip, a trivia question 20 years from now.

Wale's single "Lotus Flower Bomb" is No. 7 on the Billboard R&B/hip-hop songs chart this week, and ["That Way,"](#) his single with Jeremih and Rick Ross, is No. 5, though it's probably the least representative song on "Ambition." The song's success dates back to the summer, when it was a breakout hit from "Maybach Music Group Presents: Self Made, Vol. 1" (Maybach Music Group/Warner Brothers), [a compilation of songs from artists on Rick Ross's label](#), released in May. By any measurement it's a better album than "Ambition," especially in its judicious use of Wale, the crew's least characteristic artist.

"Ambition" may be the best Wale release since his 2008 mixtape "The Mixtape About Nothing," but it's still chaotic. He's not the triumphalist that his boss is, and the production here feels too grand for him — he's a gummy rapper still tentative about his subject matter, his flow patterns and his presence.

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Published: November 18, 2011

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Mr. Cole has a pair of hits on the chart too, though they're lower down. Of these three rappers he's probably the most charismatic, but "[Cole World](#)" feels like a compromise between the confident artist who became a favorite because of his thoughtful mixtapes and someone who understands that those sorts of intricate songs have little to do with success in the nonvirtual world.

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Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

J. Cole

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But not that long ago, Drake was just a rapper hoping to transcend the Internet. "So Far Gone," his breakout 2009 mixtape, was an Internet phenomenon that became something much greater, spawning radio hits and even garnering a pair of Grammy nominations, a first for a mixtape.

Unlike Mac Miller, Wale and Mr. Cole, Drake was a steady presence on radio for months leading up to the release of his 2010 debut album, "Thank Me Later," which sold approximately 447,000 copies in its first week, and eventually went platinum. Drake had used the Internet as a springboard to the old-fashioned sort of fame.

Being white, Mac Miller faces a problem Wale and Mr. Cole don't have: Will radio regard him as a rapper or a pop artist? Which stations will he be played on? Being white essentially doubles his options, and possibly dilutes his message. "Blue Slide Park" is an extremely lighthearted album; Mac Miller isn't ever not having fun. He toggles between complex rhyme and cheap punch lines, working equally hard at both.

But there are flickers of savvy at work here. "Loitering" has a tremendous, unconventional, guttural beat by Young L, and Mac Miller's current single, "[Party on Fifth Ave.](#)," is his best to date, a breezy romp that samples "[The 900 Number](#)," one of the great 1980s hip-hop instrumentals.

If there's a model for surviving this hype spike and finding stability, it's staring Mac Miller, Wale, Mr. Cole and their peers right in the face, and probably blinding them. Next week Drake will top the album chart, knocking Mac Miller back down to earth; Drake's expected to sell 600,000 to 700,000 copies of his second album, "Take Care" (Young Money/Cash Money/Universal Republic) this week, which will be one of the biggest debut weeks of the year.

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But even Drake, now part of the establishment, isn't above continuing to work within the new model. After the singles from "Thank Me Later" dried up, he spent much of last summer stoking the flame for "Take Care" with free songs released on his blog — some of which ended up on the album, and others that now live only in the Internet's memory. If it ain't broke, don't break it.

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